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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DHAKA 000723

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SUBJECT: (C) PM ADVISOR RIZVI TAPPED TO TAKE ON INDIA, U.S.
RELATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Prime Minister confidante Gohar Rizvi told the Ambassador July 21 that he had accepted formal appointment as PM Advisor for International Affairs and Special Representative. Rizvi said he would focus on relations with India from Charlottesville while retaining his chair at the University of Virginia. PM Sheikh Hasina charged Rivzi with improving relations with India to deliver economic benefits to Bangladesh from improved ties within 18 months, also setting primacy on relations with the U.S. The PM advisor shared the Ambassador's view that Tipaimukh Dam represents an opportunity for the GOB to better relations with India, derive economic benefit to Bangladesh, and - if the Awami League Government can - manage opposition BNP blowback. Rivzi welcomed confirmation that the U.S. strongly supported improved GOB-GOI relations. Rizvi took on board the Ambassador's advocacy on behalf of Boeing's aircraft deal, U.S. shippers and a U.S.-owned hospital.

Making it Official: Relations with India, U.S. Focus

¶2. (C) Rizvi told the Ambassador July 21 that he had earlier that day accepted formal appointment as the Prime Minister's Advisor on International Relations and Special Representative. The PM had asked him to take on the assignment, while still residing outside of Bangladesh, with a dual focus on relations with India and the U.S., Rizvi noted. On India, the PM charged Rizvi with making improvements in bilateral relations that would deliver tangible economic benefits to the expectant Bangladeshi electorate - within 18 months. On the U.S., the PM tasked Rizvi with enhancing close liaison with Washington as well as providing ongoing assessments of Bangladesh-related developments in the United States. The PM advisor said that he planned to keep his chair at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville with a reduced workload, and travel to India as circumstances required. He was mindful of coordination with incoming Bangladeshi envoys in both countries, confident that he could build on amicable relations with both to serve effectively as special envoy.

¶3. (C) PM advisor Rizvi said that he saw improved relations with India as not only his designated priority task, but also as central to PM Sheikh Hasina's popularity and continued electoral success. The PM believed that improved relations with India offered the real prospect of tangible economic benefits to Bangladesh. Rizvi lamented that

the Prime Minister had not developed an effective mechanism to "tell her new government's story" to the Bangladesh electorate. The PM had been surprised when queried by Rizvi on the effectiveness of her government's efforts in this regard, suggesting that her appointment of a GOB Public Relations Officer had

accomplished the task. Rizvi added that the GOB had yet to develop an effective engagement strategy to counter policy criticism

from the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP); and the GOB's current strategy of refusing to acknowledge policy problems was not working. He cited the lackluster GOB response to spirited BNP criticism of GOB inaction on the Tipaimukh Dam project as a case in point.

Tipaimukh Test

¶4. (C) The PM's advisor agreed with the Ambassador's assessment that Bangladesh could quickly derive direct

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economic benefit if it allowed Indian transit. He shared the Ambassador's view that the controversial Tipaimukh Dam project represented an opportunity for PM Sheikh Hasina's government. Rather than brushing off the BNP's criticism of the proposed project, he concurred with the Ambassador that the GOB should seize the initiative on Tipaimukh. The GOB needed to seek to clarify whether the dam would reduce the flow of water into Bangladesh during the dry season (e.g. by directing water for downstream irrigation in India, which would require politically and economically disastrous water diversion) as well as how seismic risk would be mitigated. Rizvi shared the view that electricity offtake from the Tipaimukh project represented a potential economic and political boon for Bangladesh. Particularly if it helped Bangladesh address its chronic electricity shortage, Tipaimukh was precisely the type of engagement with India that could deliver tangible benefits for Bangladesh and undercut knee-jerk BNP criticism of PM Sheikh Hasina's government, Rizvi added. Rizvi intended to shape the report of a parliamentary delegation set to look into Tipaimukh so that it would address these questions.

The Path Forward

¶5. (C) Rizvi said that he would be presented to the Awami League party faithful at a July 23 conclave and return to the U.S. to immediately take up his duties. He welcomed continued close cooperation with the U.S. in Washington and Dhaka. The PM's international affairs advisor was clear on the daunting task ahead, saying he would rely on the PM's trust and his cordial relations with the Foreign Minister and Bangladesh's bilateral envoys to make the

arrangement work. Rizvi appreciated the Ambassador's good offices in introductions and liaison in Washington. He made clear that close collaboration with the United States was not only his assignment from the PM, but also a key element in his approach toward improving relations with India.

U.S. Interests

¶6. (C) Rizvi appeared relieved to hear the Ambassador stress that the U.S. supported strong Bangladesh relations with India.

Such a healthy relationship would help stabilize South Asia, the Ambassador noted. Rizvi also agreed that addressing Bangladesh's energy deficit, tackling corruption, and maintaining the pace of economic growth were the core tasks facing the GOB. Rizvi took on board the Ambassador's urging that the GOB move forward on a sovereign guarantee for the sale of Boeing aircraft.

He was similarly engaged on the Ambassador's pressing to relieve U.S. shippers and a U.S. hospital from proposed GOB foreign ownership restrictions and extortionary harassment, respectively. Rizvi made clear that he would continue to raise these issues with PM Sheikh Hasina.

Comment

¶7. (C) Rizvi's formal appointment is good news. His reflective and informed counsel directly into the ear of PM Sheikh Hasina augurs well for the prospects for our continued close bilateral cooperation and for a more constructive GOB-GOI relationship. Rizvi's appointment also reflects the PM's recognition of her government's urgent need to gain traction on concrete deliverables for the Bangladeshi electorate.

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Rizvi, thus far engaged at a distance from the day-to-day political maelstrom surrounding the hands-on PM, appeared undaunted by his challenging assignment to deliver the goods to the PM within the next 18 months. U.S. interests in Bangladesh and beyond would be well served by supporting him.

MORIARTY